Influence of Brand's Societal Stewardship on Brand Advocacy & Repurchase Intention

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ABSTRACT

The importance of customer brand loyalty is increasing day by day as organizations strive to create a unique brand image and positive brand associations in the minds of the customers. Brand trust has been observed to influence brand repurchase intentions and brand advocacy. More and more organizations are engaging in social causes as such activities have been found to result in positive and favorable brand associations by the customers. There is limited research on how brand's societal stewardship influences the repurchase intentions and brand advocacy by the consumers. This study was carried out in context of personal care brands engaged in social causes. The study examines the mediating role of brand societal stewardship on customer trust, brand advocacy and repurchase intentions. Data analysis was done using SPSS AMOS and SPSS Andrew Hays Process v3.4 Model 4. The output indicates that the customers were influenced by the societal initiatives taken by the brand and it impacted customer behaviour towards brand advocacy. However, the societal stewardship did not increase the repurchase intention of the customers

Introduction

Brand building does not happen overnight. It is quite a challenging task to continuously find ways of differentiating the brand so as to create a unique image in the customer's mind. Sustainable development emphasizing on simultaneous adoption of concern for environment, economic prosperity and social equity principles have become essential ingredients for corporate sustainability (First & Khetriwal, 2010). Many brands aspiring for positive brand associations by customers are committing to one or the other social cause which is viewed as an investment for building brand equity (Guzman, Montana, & Sierra, 2006). Research on brands that have associated with social values has gained a lot of interest from academicians. Encompassed in such researches are ideas of brand stewardship (Speak, 1998), citizen brands (Gobe, 2002), cause related marketing (Varadarajan & Menon, 1998) and corporate societal marketing (Hoeffler & Keller, 2002).

Senior management custodianship, managing brand credibility and elements of brand identity are three critically important dimensions of successful brands which are meaningfully differentiated from the competition and are profitable to the stakeholders as well as the shareholders (Balmer, 2012). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities carried out by organizations can be categorized into four groups following (a) instrumental theory wherein the objective of the organization is wealth creation (b) political theory wherein organizations aim to create a powerful image in the society and thereafter use this power responsibly in country's politics (c) integrative theory wherein organizations focus on satisfying societal demands and (d) ethical theory based on organization's ethical responsibilities towards the society (Garriga & Mele´, 2004).

Brands today are engaging and associating themselves with various social causes and despite multiple studies on determining variables affecting repurchase intention (Aron, 2006), there is limited research on how brand's societal stewardship influences the repurchase behavior and brand advocacy by the consumers. This study examines the mediating role of brand societal stewardship on customer trust, brand advocacy and repurchase intention.

Literature Review

Customers continuously evaluate their purchases and their level of satisfaction with the consumption is instrumental in building trust in the brand (Cronin & Taylor , 1992). Studies indicate that customers tend to defect despite expressing their satisfaction with the brand and their repurchase behavior might not be predicted solely on the level of customer satisfaction (Feng & Yanru, 2013). While brand satisfaction might not lead to brand commitment, it is the trust in the brand which has an effect on affective and continuance commitment (Erciş, Unal, Candan, & Yildirim, 2012).

Repurchase behaviors are indicative of brand commitment and firms with loyal customer portfolios are able to safeguard their market share owing to the repeat purchase behavior exhibited by these set of customers (Erciş, Unal, Candan, & Yildirim, 2012). Brand trust positively influences purchase intentions and positive referrals (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013) thereby influenceing the consumers' attitude towards the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001) leading to their resistance to negative information about the brand (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012) thereby increasing repurchase intentions (Sarkar & Murthy, 2012; Vlachos & Vrechopoulos, 2012; Fang, Chiu, & Wang, 2011).

Customer engagement in spreading a positive word of mouth (WOM) both online and offline is of great value for organizations as this customer advocacy, depicted in the form of customers proactively recommending a brand, is indicative of brand power (Fuggetta, 2012). Failure to leverage the power of brand advocates can result into a disadvantageous position for the brand (Bhati & Verma, 2020). Some studies have pronounced brand advocacy to be a much stronger indicator of brand loyalty in comparison to repurchase behavior (Mazzarol, Sweeney, & Soutar, 2007; Reichheld, 2006).

Organizations strive to have loyal customers as they demonstrate pro-brand behaviors for their trusted brands by spreading a positive word of mouth and showing resistance to negative information (Park, Eisingerich, & Park, 2013). However, it is quite possible that despite having trust in the brand/organization, the consumers might not express their loyalty through brand advocacy or repurchase intentions which led us to formulating the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a positive association between Brand Trust (*BrTr*) and Brand Repurchase Intention (*BrRepur*)
H2: There is a positive association between Brand Trust (*BrTr*) and Brand Advocacy Loyalty (*BrAdvo*)

Besides the growing importance of differentiating in a cluttered market, there is also an increasing pressure on companies to behave responsibly towards society. Brands which take up a social cause and carry out operations on such an ethical base, showcase their commitment to coexisting with and providing solutions to society, which in turn results in higher brand equity of the organization (Bedbury & Fenichell, 2002). The concept of cause related marketing, wherein organizations are engaged in corporate philanthropy with profit-driven objectives is being adopted by a number of organizations (Varadarajan & Menon, 1998) and the positive earnings effect from the cause are transferred to the sponsoring brand (Till & Nowak, 2000). Consumers while evaluating alternatives exhibit inclination to purchase the brands of those companies supporting social cause and this creates a competitive advantage for companies engaged in cause related marketing (Barone, Miyazaki, & Taylor, 2000).

Since all activities undertaken by an organization affects the perception of its brands, the organizations start working backward by figuring out the activities which would lead to desired perceptions. Good corporate citizenship contributes value to the company, especially when philanthropy is clearly related to the brand (Blumenthal & Bergstrom, 2003). Ethical behavior of organizations has always garnered positive customer perceptions resulting in sustainable competitive advantage resulting in customer trust expressed through loyalty towards the brand/organization (Aramburu & Pescador, 2019). Experimental studies have reported that customers prefer purchasing from companies that engage in CSR activities particularly in domains where customers see a fit between the company and CSR cause (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Sen, Bhattacharya, & Korschun , 2006). Brand which are positioned as "a CSR Brand" rather than a brand that just engages in CSR enjoys several advantages in terms of customer brand loyalty and brand advocacy. Organizations

positioned on CSR are therefore better off than organizations which emphasize only on product quality and rely on elements of marketing to build a brand image. Customers' awareness of the CSR initiatives of the brand and their understanding regarding the brands motives for engaging in these CSR activities are key determinants resulting in customer belief formation for the brand (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2007).

Organizations that adopt the philosophy of social stewardship promise to provide a better quality of life to all by directing their actions towards addressing the challenges faced by the society where the organization operates (Persley, Meade, & Sarkis, 2007). Organization related information is subconsciously gathered, encoded and processed by the customers and it is reflected in their purchase behavior (Gupta, Czinkota, & Melewar, 2013).

Organizations pursuing sustainability stewardship aim for triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental performance in business (Heuer, 2010). Corporate sustainability stewardship influences consumer attitude (Pickett-Baker & Ozaki, 2008), perceptions and behavior (Hoek, Roling, & Holdsworth, 2012) and it has been observed that altruistic consumers having positive image of firms practicing cause related marketing willingly change brands to support these companies (Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001) and even advocate for companies following sustainable practices (Schultz, 2001).

Corporate philanthropy was found to positively impact consumer perceptions which however were not translated to brand patronage (Ricks, 2005). The conversion of brand's ethical practices to stronger consumer brand relationships is an area of interest both for industry practitioners as well as for academicians. Consumer responses in the form of positive attitude towards CSR or cause related marketing activities (Pelloza & Shang, 2011), emotional responses in the form of expressed gratitude (Xie, Bagozzi, & Gronhaug, 2015), pride and guilt (Kim & Johnson, 2013) have established that CSR activities carried out by organizations influence the brand advocacy of corporate brands. Trust has been found to be positively correlated with purchase intention (Mosavi & Ghaedi, 2012) which increases in instances of cause related marketing activities by the brand (Sarwar , Abbasi, & Saleem, 2012). Positive customer-brand relationship has been said to be the antecedent of brand advocacy (Wallace, Buil, & De Chernatony, 2012). The quality of customer brand relationship might result in an e-WOM (Chu & Sung, 2015) thereby influencing large audience. The brand's societal stewardship might prompt the consumers to speak positively about the brand's CSR or cause related activities which might not be the case had the brand/organization not got engaged in such activities. It is quite possible that the brand's societal stewardship might lead to higher brand loyalty expressed in the form of intention to repurchase and/or brand advocacy which led us to developing the following hypothesis:

H3: The association between Brand Trust (*BrTr*) and Brand Advocacy *(BrAdvo)* is mediated by Brand's Societal Stewardship (*BSoS*)
H4: The association between Brand Trust (*BrTr*) and Brand Repurchase Intention *(BrRepur)* is mediated by Brand's Societal Stewardship (*BSoS*)

Conceptual Model

Previous studies have studied brand repurchase intentions and brand advocacy resulting from increased brand trust. To the best of the knowledge of the authors after carrying out extant literature review, the impact of brand's societal stewardship on brand trust, brand advocacy and repurchase intensions has not been studied extensively. This prompted us to develop the conceptual model (refer to figure 1) to study the mediating role of brand's societal stewardship on brand trust, repurchase intensions and brand advocacy.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model
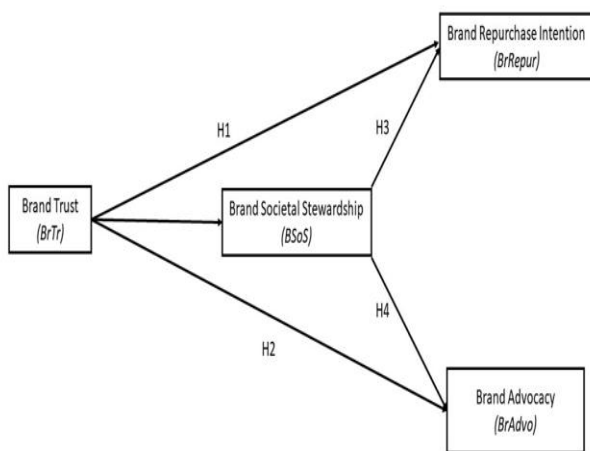
Research Methodology

i. Sample and Study Procedure

The study was carried out in context of personal care brands engaged in social causes like women empowerment and concern for environment. The respondents were briefed about the social activities of some personal care brands and only if they were aware of these activities, were they asked to fill the survey instrument. A pilot study on the research instrument developed was carried out on a sample of 75 respondents. The analysis of sample data showed positive and encouraging results, which were in line with the conceptual model. So, a larger study was carried out and sample was collected from various cities of India like Mumbai, Pune, Delhi-NCR, Bangalore, Kolkata, Indore, Jaipur, Lucknow, Hyderabad and Chennai and from various other tier II cities to cover all parts of India i.e. east, west, north, south and central regions. Data was collected using online and physical survey forms. A total of 382 responses were received out of which 314 responses were found suitable for the study and 68 responses were dropped due to incomplete information. The response rate was observed to be 82.198 %.

ii. Measures

Brand Trust (BrTr)

The study used four items for the measurement of Brand Trust with minor modifications for this survey. Items like "I trust this brand", "The brand is reliable", "This is an honest brand", "The brand is dependable" proposed by multiple researchers were used for the study (Xie, Batra, & Peng, 2015); (Leninkumar, 2017); (Ball, Coelho, & Machás, 2004); (Turgut & Gultekin, 2015).

Brand Societal Stewardship (BSoS)

The Five items used for the measurement of Brand Societal Stewardship were adopted with modifications from instrument developed by Barbuto & Wheeler. It included items like "This brand believes that it needs to play a moral role in society", "This brand believes that it needs to function as a community", "This brand sees for its potential to contribute to society", "This brand encourages customers to have a community spirit", "This brand preparing society to make a positive difference in the future" (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006)

Brand Repurchase Intention (BrRepur)

The four items for Brand Repurchase Intention were adopted with modifications from scale developed by Fullerton. This measure included items like "I intend to buy this brand in the near future", "I would actively search for this brand in order to buy it", "This brand would be my first choice", "I consider myself to be loyal to this brand", "I will not buy other brands if the same product is available at the store" (Fullerton, 2005).

Brand Advocacy (BrAdvo)

Brand Advocacy Loyalty was measured with three items developed by Fullerton with modification appropriate for this study. It contained items like "I recommend this brand to someone who seeks my advice", "I will say positive about this brand", "I will suggest this brand to my friends and relatives" (Fullerton, 2005).

All items in the instrument were presented on a Five point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The details of the attributes studied for the research are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Brand Trust, Advocacy, Repurchase and Societal Stewardship Measures

Brand Trust		
1	I trust this brand	(Xie, Batra, & Peng, 2015); (Leninkumar, 2017); (Ball, Coelho, & Machás, 2004), (Turgut & Gultekin, 2015)
2	The brand is reliable	
3	This is an honest brand	
4	The brand is dependable	
Brand Societal Stewardship		
1	This brand believes that it needs to play a moral role in society.	(Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006)
2	This brand believes that it	

	needs to function as a community.	
3	This brand sees for its potential to contribute to society.	
4	This brand encourages customers to have a community spirit	
5	This brand preparing society to make a positive difference in the future	
Brand Repurchase Intention		
1	I intend to buy this brand in the near future.	
2	I would actively search for this brand in order to buy it.	
3	This brand would be my first choice.	(Fullerton, 2005)
4	I consider myself to be loyal to this brand	
5	I will not buy other brands if the same product is available at the store.	
Brand Advocacy		
1	I recommend this brand to someone who seeks my advice.	
2	I will say positive about this brand.	(Fullerton, 2005)
3	I will suggest this brand to my friends and relatives.	

Data Analysis & Interpretation

Data analysis was done using SPSS AMOS and SPSS Andrew Hays Process v3.4 Model 4. 40% of the respondents were male while 60% were females. 39% of the respondents were in age bracket of 21- 25 years, 20% were in age bracket of 26-30years, 25% belonged to age group of 31-35 years while remaining 16% were more than 35 years of age. 43% of the respondents were married while 57% were single. Further 14% of the respondents had income less than 5 lacs per annum, 21% had income between 5 lacs to 10 lacs, 22% reported having income between 10lacs to 15 lacs while remaining 43% of the respondents had income more than 15 lacs per annum.

Figure 2 presents the AMOS model while Table 2 presents the details of the model

Figure 2: Brand Societal Stewardship Model

Table 2: Measurement Model

Proposed Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	CFI	RMSEA	RMR
BrTr – BSoS – BrRepur /BrAdvo Model	257.409	114	2.26	0.911	0.881	0.905	0.063	0.035

* Brand Trust – Brand Societal Stewardship – Brand Repurchase Intentions / Brand Advocacy

The acceptable model fit values proposed by multiple authors (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008); (Fullerton, 2005); (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996) are: (χ^2/df) minimum 2.0 with better model fit for higher values; GFI = 0.95 and above; AGFI = 0.90 and above; RMSEA preferably below 0.08 (for good fit) and RMSEA between 0.08 – 0.10 (average or fair fit); and RMR as low as possible (preferably below 0.10). The model obtained indicates a moderate fit.

Reliability & Validity

The validity of the scales was assessed through convergent and discriminant validity. The average variance extracted (AVA) was used as a measure for convergent validity. The recommended value of AVA is greater than 0.50 was considered. In the case of discriminant validity, procedure proposed by (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) was followed, which indicate that discriminant validity values should be greater than the correlation values of study variables. The details are presented in table 3 and table 4 below.

Table 3: Assessment of Reliability & Validity

Items	AVE	CR	Discriminant Validity	Cronbach Alpha
Brand Trust	0.587	0.851	0.766	0.764
Brand Societal Stewardship	0.575	0.871	0.758	0.812
Brand	0.503	0.815	0.695	0.714

	Mean	SD	Age in years	Gender	BrTrust	BSoS	BrRepur	BrAdvo
Repurchase Intention								
Brand Advocacy	0.639	0.841	0.799		0.718			

Table 4: Mean, SD, Correlation & Reliability

	Mean	SD	Age in years	Gender	BrTrust	BSoS	BrRepur	BrAdvo
Age (yrs)	32.97	10.92	-					
Gender	1.61	0.49	0.27	-				
BrTrust	15.04	2.45	0.05	0.12	(0.764)			
BSoS	18.18	3.02	0.12	0.07	0.20	(0.812)		
BrRepur	15.32	2.64	-0.07	0.10	0.31	0.11	(0.714)	
BrAdvo	11.59	1.83	0.06	0.06	0.31	0.32	0.16	(0.718)

N = 314, correlation significant at 0.05 level. Reliability is depicted diagonally in italics.

Analysis

The test of mediation was applied using four conditions suggested by (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The first condition states that predictor variable (BrTrust) should directly influence mediator variable (BSoS). A significant relationship was observed between the two variables. The second condition is that the mediator variable significantly influences the criteria variables brand repurchase intention (BrRepur) and brand advocacy (BrAdvo). This condition was found significant between brand societal stewardship (BSoS) and brand advocacy (BrAdvo), whereas it was found insignificant between brand societal stewardship (BSoS) and brand repurchase intentions (BrRepur).

The third condition is that the predictor variable (BrTrust) should significantly influence criteria variables, brand repurchase intention (BrRepur) and brand advocacy (BrAdvo). This condition was also fulfilled.

The fourth condition was fulfilled for mediation by brand societal stewardship between brand trust and brand advocacy. Total effect was observed to be 0.2302, direct effect was observed to be 0.1899 and indirect effect was found to be 0.0403 which indicates that brand societal stewardship acted as a mild mediator between brand trust and brand advocacy. However, the fourth condition was not fulfilled for mediation by brand societal stewardship (BSoS) between brand trust (BrTrust) and brand repurchase intentions (BrRepur). The AMOS output indicated total effect (0.3304), direct effect (0.3191), indirect effect (0.0114), BootLLCI (-0.0141) and BootULCI (0.0380), thus indicating that there was no mediation effect in this case.

Conclusion

The output indicates that the customers were influenced by the societal initiatives taken by the brand and it impacted customer behaviour in the form of Brand Advocacy. However, the societal stewardship did not increase the repurchase intention of the customers. The weak mediating effect of Brand's Societal Stewardship might be because the study was limited to personal care brands, the purchase frequency of which is not very high. The purchase of personal care brands is also dependant on the benefits sought by the customer which varies a lot from person to person, which might be a major antecedent for repurchase of personal care products. Further, the customers are very choosy about personal care brands in comparison to FMCG brands. The CSR or Cause Related Marketing activities might increase the brand trust but they may not necessarily reflect in repurchase intention of customers although they may start advocating the brand.

Limitations & Managerial Implications

Customer awareness and advocacy might be higher as a result of the CSR or Cause Related Marketing activities, but it may not necessarily be reflected in increase in sales. This could be probably attributed to the present study being limited to personal care brands. We were motivated to study the mediating role of brand's societal stewardship on brand advocacy and repurchase intention owing to many personal care brands being involved in social causes. However, the results are indicative that for personal care brands, such social causes might not directly affect the purchase intentions.

Scope for Future Studies

Similar studies can be carried out for brands in Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), Fast Moving Consumer Durables (FMCD), Automobiles etc. in order to study if the mediating role of brand's societal stewardship is higher..

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